

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
HA-05 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 ACDA-12 DOE-11 DOEE-00 SOE-02 /104 W
-----118928 011926Z /46

O R 011758Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 0986
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1529

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PBOR, IS, EG
SUBJ: THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS: A UNIQUELY ISRAELI PROBLEM

SUMMARY: IT SHOULD HAVE COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE
ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI HAVE BECOME A
STICKING POINT IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT; THE ISSUE
EMBODIES MUCH THAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT ISRAEL. SETTLEMENT
OF THE LAND REMAINS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF ZIONIST
THINKING, AND EXERTS ITS INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL
PROCESS THROUGH SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS. SOME OF THESE
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ORGANIZATIONS PRE-DATE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE
AND OTHERS ARE RELATIVELY RECENT; IN SOME CASES THEY
DIFFER RADICALLY ON MOST POLITICAL ISSUES, BUT ON THE
ISSUE OF SETTLEMENTS THEY FIND COMMON GROUND. THE
SINAI SETTLEMENTS ALSO EVOKE THE ISRAELI DESIRE FOR
MAXIMAL SECURITY, OCCUPYING AS THEY DO TERRITORY WHICH
HAS FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN EVERY SINAI CONFLICT AND

WHICH, FROM THE ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE, SERVES AS A BUFFER BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN SINAI AND THE PALESTINIAN GAZA STRIP. NEITHER THE SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS NOR THE PUBLIC AT LARGE ARE LIKELY TO OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT THE FATE OF THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS WILL SERVE AS A PRECEDENT FOR WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE ON THE GOLAN AND THE WEST BANK, AREAS WHERE BOTH ZIONIST CONVICTION AND SECURITY ASPECTS LOOM EVEN LARGER THAN IN THE SINAI. END SUMMARY.

1. ONE HAS FELT BOTH A SENSE OF SURPRISE AND OF DJA VU WHILE WATCHING THE SAGA OF THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS UNFOLD. SURPRISE, PERHAPS, BECAUSE THE SETTLEMENTS CRUNCH WAS SUPPOSED TO OCCUR FIRST ON THE GOLAN RATHER THAN IN THE SINAI. BUT IN RESTROSPECT, THAT WAS ONLY BECAUSE WE ENVISIONED A PROCESS IN WHICH ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS WOULD COME INTO PLAY WITH THE FIRST "SILLY FEW KILOMETERS" ON THE GOLAN, BUT WOULD BE ENDANGERED ONLY AT THE END OF A SINAI SETTLEMENT. SADAT'S GRAND GESTURE AND BEGIN'S SINCERE ATTEMPT TO RESPOND--AT LEAST AS REGARDS THE SINAI--CHANGED THE ORDER OF EVENTS. THE INTERESTS OF THE SETTLEMENTS ORGANIZATIONS, HOWEVER, HAVE NOT CHANGED, AND THUS THE FEELING OF DEJA VU.

2. IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT IN LATE 1975, FOLLOWING SINAI II AND WHEN IT APPEARED THAT "GOLAN II" WAS NEXT ON THE (U.S.) AGENDA, THE SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS MOUNTED CONFIDENTIAL

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AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST WITHDRAWAL ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT THESE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NOT ACQUIRED THE DEGREE OF VESTED INTEREST IN THE RAFAH AREA THAT THEY HAVE IN THE GOLAN, THEY NEVERTHELESS HAVE SENT SETTLERS TO THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS AND FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY TO THEM. MORE TO THE OINT, HOWEVER, THE SETTLEMENT LEADERSHIP UNDOUBTEDLY VIEWS ANY TINKERING WITH SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI AS A VERY DANGEROUS PRECEDENT, ESPECIALLY WITH ALL THE TALK ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE PEACE. THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT DOES TO SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI IT WILL BE HARD-PRESSED NOT TO DO AS WELL ON THE GOLAN AND THE WEST BANK.

3. IN ONE SENSE, THE WEIGHT OF THE SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS, THE MOST EFFECTIVE OF WHICH ARE AFFILIATED WITH THE LABOR ALIGNMENT AND IN THE PAST HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EXERT THEIR INFLUENCE THROUGH SELECTED CABINET MINISTERS, IS REDUCED NOW THAT LIKUD IS IN POWER. IN OTHER WAYS, HOWEVER, THEIR IMPORTANCE TO THE PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING IS ENHANCED.

4. FOR ONE, THEY ARE ABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR OPPOSITION

TO THE PERCEIVED INTENTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT UNRE-
STRAINED BY ENTREATIES FOR MODERATION FROM MINISTERS
WITH WHOM THEY ARE POLITICALLY LINKED. THEY ARE ALSO
ABLE TO FIND COMMON CAUSE WITH OTHER POLITICAL ELEMENTS
ON WHICH THIS GOVERNMENT DOES RELY FOR POLITICAL SUPPORT,
IN PARTICULAR GUSH EMUNIM AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL MOVE-
MENT, NOT TO MENTION MANY IN HERUT. THESE FORCES AND
THE LABOR-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONS MAKE STRANGE BED-
FELLOWS IN GENERAL POLITICAL TERMS, BUT ON THE SETTLE-
MENTS ISSUE THEY FIND COMMOND GROUND. WE NEED NOT
BELABOR THE ADDITIONAL POINT THAT, IN THIS TIME OF
INCIPIENT FRAGMENTATION OF EXISTING POLITICAL UNITS,
THE SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND THE GUSH ARE AMONG THE
FEW ELEMENTS WITH AN EFFECTIVE STRUCTURAL BASE AND A
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CLEAR SENSE OF PRIORITIES.

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ACTION NEA-10

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5. AS WAS THE CASE IN 1975, THESE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NO TROUBLE CATCHING THE PUBLIC EAR, FOR SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IS ALWAYS NEWSWORTHY HERE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THERE IS THE SENSE OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY. NOW THAT THEY HAVE THEIR AUDIENCE, HOWEVER, THE MESSAGE AS HEARD BY COMFORTABLE RESIDENTS OF TEL AVIV OR BEERSHEBA IS NOT SO MUCH SETTLEMENTS PER SE, BUT SOMETHING MUCH MORE EASILY UNDERSTOOD--SECURITY. ENOUGH ISRAELIS FOUGHT THEIR WAY THROUGH GAZA AND KHAN YUNIS TO EL ARISH IN 1956 OR 1967--OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO DID--THAT THE MESSAGE CAN BE COMPELLING. MOREOVER, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE ISRAELI ATTACK IN 1956 WAS PROMPTED PRIMARILY BY TERRORISM EMANATING FROM GAZA WITH EGYPT'S ACTIVE SUPPORT, WHICH IN TURN WAS FACILITATED BY THE CONTIGUITY OF THE SINAI AND THE GAZA STRIP.

6. MORE DIFFICULT FOR OUTSIDERS TO GRASP, OF COURSE, IS THE ACCOMPANYING, DEEP-SEATED ZIONIST COMPULSION TO SETTLE THE LAND AND, MORE PERTINENTLY, THE BELIEF THAT IMPORTANT TERRAIN IS NOT TRULY SECURED UNTIL THERE ARE JEWS LIVING ON IT. THE LONGER THIS ISSUE REMAINS UNSOLVED, THE MORE ISRAELIS WHO WILL COME TO BELIEVE THAT THAT TERRITORY--AND, THEREFORE, THOSE SETTLEMENTS--ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE SECURITY OF ISRAEL, AND TALK OF A NEW ERA IS NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS.

7. A FINAL NOTEWORTHY FACTOR IN THE SETTLEMENT PICTURE TODAY IS THAT LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENTAL DECISION-MAKING AND THE ACTIONS OF SETTLEMENT PROFESSIONALS. WE ARE STILL TRYING TO UNDERSTAND EXACTLY HOW THE FLOW-CHARTS REGARDING SETTLEMENT DECISION-MAKING HAVE CHANGED SINCE LAST MAY, BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THEY HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE DAYS WHEN ISRAEL GALILI WAS THE UNCHALLENGED CZAR OF SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS A WELL-KNOWN FIGURE TO THE LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS. THE RESULT WAS A CAREFUL MODULATION OF SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BROADER OUTLINES OF OFFICIAL POLICY. COORDINATION BETWEEN CABINET AND SETTLERS, AND THE MODULATION THAT RESULTED, IS MISSING TODAY--THE PRIMARY ACTORS SIMPLY DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER IN A COUNTRY WHERE EFFECTIVE COORDINATION OFTEN SPRINGS FROM SHARED EXPERIENCE.

8. ALL OF THESE FACTORS ALLOW A DETERMINED INDIVIDUAL
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TO CUT A VERY WIDE SWATH THROUGH THE SETTLEMENT PICUTRE WITH RELATIVE IMPUNITY, AND THIS ROLE HAS APPARENTLY FOUND ITS ACTOR IN ARIK SHARON. WHETHER SHARON IS SERIOUSLY ATTEMPTING TO FORM A POLITICAL MOVEMENT AROUND THE STANDARD OF SETTLEMENTS IS DIFFICULT TO SAY AT THIS POINT. WHAT IS CLEARER, AND MORE GERMANE, IS THAT HE IS APPARENTLY CONVINCED ON SECURITY GROUNDS THAT BEGIN HAS OFFERED TOO MUCH ALREADY IN THE SINAI. (SHARON FOUGHT HIS WAY ACROSS TWO DIFFERENT AXES IN THE SINAI IN 1956 AND 1967.) SPECIFICALLY, SHARON IS CONVINCED THAT THE SETTLEMENTS IN THE RAFAH APPROACHES COMPRISE AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF ISRAEL'S FUTURE SECURITY BY DISRUPTIN THE CONTIGUITY BETWEEN THE SINAI AND THE GAZA STRIP. (IT WAS NOT UNTIL SHARON WAS O.C. SOUTHERN COMMAND, IN 1971, THAT TERRORISM IN THE STRIP WAS FINALLY STAMPED OUT.)

9. WHATEVER SHARON'S MOTIVATION, HE HAS PROVEN THAT HE IS NOT BEYOND TAKING STEPS THAT HE MUST HAVE KNOWN--OR CALCULATED--WOULD HAVE BEEN HIGHLY EMBARRASSING TO THE GOVERNMENT AND DETRIMENTAL TO ITS POLICY GOALS. THERE IS UNDOUBTEDLY A LIMIT TO HOW MUCH OF THIS BEGIN WILL TOLERATE. SHARON IS STILL OPERATING FROM A FAIRLY NARROW POLITICAL BASE, AND WOULD APPEAR (AT LEAST FOR NOW) TO BE QUITE VULNERABLE SHOULD BEGIN DECIDE TO DISPENSE WITH HIM. UNTIL THAT TIME MAY ARRIVE, HOWEVER, SHARON WILL REMAIN A FIGURE WITHWHOM THE REST OF THE GOVERNMENT--AND THE U.S.--WILL HAVE TO RECKON.

10. IN A MORE POSITIVE VEIN, THEREIS AT THIS POINT A SUBSTANTIAL BODY OF OPINION WHICH WOULD OPT FOR PEACE RATHER THAN THE RETENTION OF THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS. THIS QUESTION HAS NOT BEEN POSED IN CONCRETE TERMS, HOWEVER, AND THERE IS AS YET NO MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP AROUND WHICH SUCH OPINION CAN COALESCE AND ASSUME POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. (WE ARE REPORTING FURTHER ON THIS ASPECT
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OF THE PROBLEM SEPTTEL.)
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LAND SETTLEMENT, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, PEACE TALKS, MILITARY OCCUPIED AREAS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TELAV01529
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780048-0761
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197802104/aaaadjxg.tel
Line Count: 275
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 18806dcd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3437464
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS: A UNIQUELY ISRAELI PROBLEM SUMMARY: IT SHOULD HAVE COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI HAVE BECOME A
TAGS: PGOV, PBOR, PINR, PDEV, IS, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/18806dcd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014